Inge Hoonte, october 2011

Random Personalized Exhibition Experience v.10.5.11

This project establishes connections between people to create unexpected narratives in an exhibition experience.

A computer script connects three separate sets of data to one another, namely Actions, Questions, and People. The results, or links between nodes and how they relate to one another, are processed by a graphic visualization software. This visual output is then saved as a PDF. The link between two nodes is visualized as an arrow. Each group of nodes has its own predetermined box or shape. The file is then printed onto paper. This map forms the base for navigation of an exhibition space. The user of the map, or the player of this textual game, is the exhibition audience. The player picks a point to start, and follows the questions and actions from there to create his/her own individual experience.

An example. Let's say you start at the action 'open and close a door.' After you perform the action, an arrow on the map will lead you to the question 'Are you wearing two pairs of socks?' Answering 'no' might then take you to a person, eg 'Ask Natasa Siencnik "How many Stephans (or Stefans) are there in your family?"', and so on.

There are over 60 nodes involved, in between which over 60 links crisscross one another. Thanks to the total amount of variables, over 100 different graphic maps can be generated. This means that each copy offers a unique experience of the space the map is portraying, in which the Actions, Questions, and People present shape the architecture, not the actual physical space. Specific questions on the map direct the player to a person who's present on paper as well as in the physical space.

The player in this model is subjected to a script. Albeit for the first time, they are mere agents performing a communicative routine through short interactions with strangers.

How
I wrote a computer program (in Python) in which various algorithms connect individual nodes that are part of three larger sets of data, which are stored in a text file. The connections that the program forms between these nodes are random, and differ each time I execute the program. The output data (the connections between nodes) is interpreted by graphic visualization software (GraphViz) which outputs it as a PDF. Nodes are linked together by lines. The PDF is then printed onto A3 paper and functions as a navigation map of the exhibition space.

Why
I wanted to combine the ways in which we explore space and can get to know strangers, or each other, along the way. Because the project was presented during a live art event, I could play with offering the audience a different notion of experiencing an exhibition, as well as inserting unexpected behavior into that space. Such as people singing, being questioned, or refusing to tell strangers their

full name, in short, personal details that don't always leak into spaces naturally. I also wanted to explore the boundaries between personal and public space by disseminating this type of information.

Captain Tweet
https://twitter.com/tweet_captain

Captain Tweet is a live twitter feed that I created for the HMS Weymouth, a settler ship traveling from Portsmouth, United Kingdom, to Algoa Bay in East South Africa. The twitter feed consists of entries in the travel log written in 1819/1820 by Captain Turner, the ship's captain.

On this ship, over 450 settlers including children left England and its dire living conditions to set out to live in a new country. The five month long trip is blogged "live" on the website (the tweets being fed in real time to the website by an automated script), including information on the food reserves, the weather conditions, and the high number of casualties, especially towards the end of the trip. All of this is presented within the generic Twitter interface, with Captain Tweet seemingly writing messages from 1819 into the present. In this way, the historical log entries are transformed into a (supposedly) live log of what is happening out on the sea.

How
As the basis for this project, I took a captain's log from 1819 that I found on the website theshipslist.com. I copied all entries into a text file, and then dated and timestamped each entry. The computer program I wrote continuously runs on the Piet Zwart server. The script runs through the list of entries, if there's a date and time that match, this robot automatically logs into the captain's Twitter account to post the message for that specific time and date.

During the exhibition "No Such Thing As Repetition," curated by Inke Arns, Captain Tweet was displayed on a computer screen. The screen was turned 90 degrees to accommodate the long list of entries on the Twitter page. A customized Firefox plug-in disabled buttons from being clicked (and navigate away from the project page), as well as refreshing the page every 15 minutes in order to display up-to-date entrees.

Why
I was looking for a manageable exercise to apply my newly learned programming skills. Ultimately I found a way to connect events that happened in the past, to a medium of the present. To give this information a new life, and a new meaning, in a new context.

Dear Philip E. Agre

Dear Philip E. Agre is a correspondence project in the form of three letters to Phil Agre, a scholar and professor in information sciences. He was reported missing by his former employer UCLA in October 2009, and found and deemed safe in January 2010 by LA's Sheriff's department. He requested to be left alone, and disappeared

again. A few colleagues who feared for his mental and physical health teamed up to search for him. They updated those interested through Twitter, Facebook, and a blog. Countless people expressed their concern by posting messages on the very networks he chose to abandon. After searching for him for over a year, a member of the group was able to talk to him in person in February 2011. Mr. Agre again expressed the desire to be left alone, to remain "offline."

In his essay Writing and Representation, Phil Agre uses examples of everyday behavioral routines to illustrate the way in which computation and communication technologies affect human interaction and privacy. Not necessarily expecting a reply, I write him a letter. And another one. And another one. Herein, I meticulously describe brief, fleeting encounters with people in my daily life, while touching upon his ideas on the obsession to constantly upkeep our always present, digital relationships as our always-on world requires. By approaching these activities, both improvised and routine, from a computational standpoint, I ask him if he thinks we could device a mathematical analyzation of all variables involved in my previous encounters as a hypothetical solution to figuring out how to connect and relate to people.

How
Having read only but a few of Phil Agre's articles, and being fairly new to the subject matter, I explored the format of letter writing as a place to relate my thoughts and ideas on human communication to his.

Why
Initially, addressing Phil Agre was a place for me to connect a few of my own experiences to his theories. The more I found out about his disappearance and possible whereabouts, the more I became aware of the multiple layers of the project. An effort to communicate with someone who doesn't want to be reached easily turned into a musing to myself, to gain deeper understanding of my own developing practice. He became an impetus to philosophize about mathematical, computational, and interactive problems, through practical examples.